

## **10 Characteristics of Effective Sex and HIV Education Programs**

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The curricula of the most effective sex and HIV education programs share ten common characteristics. These programs:

1. Focus on reducing one of more sexual behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancy or HIV/STD infection.
2. Are based on theoretical approaches that have been demonstrated to influence other health related behavior and identify specific important sexual antecedents to be targeted.
3. Deliver and consistently reinforce a clear message about abstaining from sexual activity and/ or using condoms or other forms of contraception. This appears to be one of the most important characteristics that distinguishes effective from ineffective programs.
4. Provide basic, accurate information about the risks of teen sexual activity and about ways to avoid intercourse or use methods of protection against pregnancy and STDs.
5. Include activities that address social pressures that influence sexual behavior.
6. Provide examples of and practice with communication, negotiation, and refusal skills.
7. Employ teaching methods designed to involve participants and have them personalize the information.
8. Incorporate behavioral goals, teaching methods, and materials that are appropriate to the age sexual experience, and culture of the students.
9. Last a sufficient length of time (i.e., more than a few hours).
10. Select teachers or peer leaders who believe in the program and then provide them with adequate training.

Generally speaking, short-term curricula – whether abstinence-only or sexuality education programs – do not have measurable impact on the behavior of teens.

## Characteristic of Successful Program Education Interventions

<p>Through the years many different sexuality education programs have been developed – some successful and others not. Those that have been successful often share similar characteristics. It is generally agreed that the following elements seem to be present in a successful sex education program.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A focus on reducing one or more sexual behaviors that leads to unintended pregnancy or HIV/ infection.</li> <li>2. A program based on theoretical approaches that have been shown to be effective in influencing other health- related risks.</li> <li>3. A clear message that reinforces a definite stance on risky behaviors.</li> <li>4. Provision of basic, accurate information about the risks of unprotected intercourse and methods of avoiding unprotected intercourse.</li> <li>5. Inclusion of activities that address social pressures on sexual behaviors.</li> <li>6. Provision of models and opportunities to practice communication, negotiation and refusal skills.</li> <li>7. Inclusion of a variety of teaching methods designed to involve the participants and have them personalize the information.</li> <li>8. Incorporation of behavioral goals, teaching methods and materials that are appropriate to the age, sexual experience and culture of the students.</li> <li>9. Duration is long enough to complete important activities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Utilization of teachers or peers who believe in the program (Kirby 1999).</li> </ol> <p>A more recent review of programs promoting abstinence , listed nine “promising elements of reviewed programs” (Thomas 2000). This list included only educational programs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Theoretical approach</li> <li>2. Reinforcement of values</li> <li>3. Parental involvement</li> <li>4. Emphasis on family communication</li> <li>5. Addressing social/media influence</li> <li>6. Training in refusal skills</li> <li>7. Role play</li> <li>8. Role models</li> <li>9. Creative media resources</li> </ol> <p>Some combination of these two lists will likely contain the most important elements of effective programs to promote sexual abstinence. Some community interventions and youth development programs are by nature unique from educational interventions, the most important components are difficult to identify. Data from the ADD Health study and other research identifies many of the factors that these interventions may want to address.</p> <p>The Medical Institute</p>
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